Determinants of Entry into First Marriage in Korea

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1. Introduction

According to marriage registration data, the mean age at first marriage was 27.8 years for males and 24.8 years for females in 1990 but marked 29.3 for males and 26.5 for females in 2000. Such changes in the ages of first marriage are worthy of attention since they influence not only demographic but also socioeconomic aspects of population. This study aims to determine factors affecting the entry into first marriage in Korea.

2. Data and Method of Analysis

The data source is a tentative 10 percent sample based on the 2000 Population and Housing Census. There are 50 items based on sample enumeration including 29 population items, i.e., age, sex, education, marital status, economic activity, etc. Aggregated data at the second administrative level of *Si, Gun, Gu* are utilized as indicators in analyzing the relationships between socioeconomic, demographic factors and the entry into first marriage.

The ordinary least square regression is the multivariate analytical tool. The Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM) as a dependent variable is examined generally within the Dixon (1971)'s marriage framework of availability, feasibility and desirability. She states that marriage is more prevalent where it is perceived as being both feasible and desirable and where potential mates are readily available. In this framework, the availability of mates is determined by the sex ratio of persons of marriageable ages and some marriages should be delayed among the more numerous sex; the feasibility of marriage is determined by expectation regarding the financial and residential independence of the newly married couple; the desirability of marriage is the strength of the motivation to marry and is determined by the availability of social and institutional alternatives to marriage.

Independent variables in this study are: Ratio of total males aged 25-29 to total females aged

25-29 (SR) for the availability of mates; Proportion of workers out of total males aged 25-29 (Work_M), Proportion of agricultural workers out of total male workers aged 25-29 (AGR) and Population size of locality (Pop) for the desirability of marriage; and, Proportion of workers out of total females aged 25-29 (Work_F), Proportion of females aged 25-29 with tertiary education (Edu_F) and Number of children per 100 married women (CWR) for the desirability of marriage.

3. Major Findings and Conclusions

In multiple regressions, 4 variables, which are LN(Pop), Work_M, CWR and Work_F, remain in both male and female models. In addition, LN(SR) appears in the equation of males while Edu_F is significant in that of females. The equations explain 67.9 percent of the total variation in SMAM for males and 65.8 percent for females.

Table 1. Determinants of the SMAM: Korea, 2000

Equations	Adj R^2	Prob>F
SMAM(Males) = 22.88 + 0.18 LN(Pop) + 1.67 LN(SR) − 0.04 CWR − 0.02 Work_M + 0.04 Work_F	0.6785	0.0001
SMAM(Females) = 23.6 + 0.34 LN(Pop) − 0.02 CWR − 0.03 Work_M + 0.03 Edu_F + 0.05 Work_F	0.6577	0.0001

Note: 1. Three hypothesized variables, Pop, SR and AGR were log-transformed but AGR was finally dropped before running regressions due to being not normal in distribution.

2. Both Pearson correlations and variance inflation factors (VIF) do not show the existence of multicollinearity among independent variables in each model.

3. Regression coefficients of all variables shown in two equations are significant at one percent level.

Given these results, broad conclusions are put forward. Firstly, unbalanced sex ratio or "marriage squeeze" emerges significantly in affecting male SMAM. One relative increase in SR predicts 1.67 years increase in male SMAM. Secondly, number of children per 100 married women, as an indicator of emotional pressure for marriage significantly affects Korean males and females to marry early. Thirdly, proportion of working males aged 25-29 decreases both male and female SMAM whereas that of working females at the same ages increases them. It is more feasible for males but less feasible for females who work to enter into marriage. Fourthly, population size of locality appears to delay male and female marriage. The larger the community size the greater the tolerance for diversity in social norms and values as to marriage. Lastly, education of women appears to increase the female SMAM. The better financial situation or more diverse attitude toward marriage among highly educated women serves as an alternative to marriage.